

pieces of lace by placing them directly onto paper that had been coated with a light-sensitive emulsion. Also at this time, Samuel Morse was creating the first instruments for electric telegraphy. These more or less simultaneous developments represent the first emergence of all the ideas, desires and technologies for the production and dissemination of digital photographic images. They also represent a moment when 'technical images' and machine-produced artefacts imitated and then superseded their handmade predecessors. These new kinds of objects, images and communications quickly became accessible to many, as they are programmatic and the programme is a model that can be shared.¹

The lace photographed by Talbot and reproduced in his book *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) was machine-made and it was presented with a text that elucidated his new, also mechanical, 'drawing' process and explained the difference between a direct contact print – a negative image – and its positive copy. In an essay on the past and future of both photography and computing, Geoffrey Batchen has suggested that Talbot's reproductive technique, the contact print or photogram, "rendered the world in binary terms, as a patterned order of the absence and presence of light."² Batchen has also highlighted the 'pixelated' structure of the material revealed by Talbot in a picture of lace magnified one hundred times.

A famous story of early responses to Talbot's images of lace is equally revealing: Talbot's friends thought that he was playing a trick on them, and were sure that he was showing them the lace itself, not a reproduction. This is photography's equivalent of Pliny's story of the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, wherein Parrhasius produced a painting so realistic that it fooled the expert eye of Zeuxis. Both stories mark a moment of progress in the Western quest for ever more realistic representations, but it is photography's ability to reproduce that sets it apart. Talbot's negative process provided a detailed lifelike image that could be reproduced infinitely, and this enabled images to become mass-produced commodities. These were the first truly technical images, produced by a programme. These programme-produced commodities had the power to convince us that the thing reproduced was real, because the image is, in some senses, caused by the object – a trace of the real world.

This 'trace' of reality is evident in the accidents of early photography whereby a necessarily long exposure often led to a small movement of the subject, causing a blur to be registered instead of the sharp definition that was the desired result. Such moments are extremely revealing, pointing to the mechanism by which the image was created rather than the subject. It is these instances, when the transparency of the photographic image is denied, that allow us to reflect on the processes that are now so commonplace and ubiquitous as to be almost invisible.

The contemporary equivalent of Talbot's contact printing process is the digital scan, and the digital 'artifact' that disrupts the scanned image by revealing its coloured pixels is akin to the accidental blur. These 'artifacts' are produced in the same way as a blur, by movement during a long exposure, as in a camera image. But the scanner image, like the contact print, is devoid of perspective and, as with the contact print, it makes explicit the 'directness' of the photographic image. This directness has historically suggested that the photograph's meaning is the same as its cause, and that no decoding is required. The presence of the 'artifact' suggests otherwise, unveiling the process of encoding and decoding that takes place during the creation and reception of photographic images, revealing their presumed naturalness as illusory.

Caroline McQuarrie's work "Artifact" takes mass-produced objects that mimic the handmade and reproduces them on the scanner, drawing a parallel between the objects and the process. The pictures suggest that we look again at the aphorisms reproduced on the scanned objects and find a tension between their mass-produced, clichéd, messages and the handmade, homely style they imitate.

1 The phrase 'technical images' and the accompanying information are derived from Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 14.

2 Geoffrey Batchen, "Obedient Numbers, Soft Delight," in Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press 2001), 164-75 at 167.

Artist's Statement

THE GOLDEN YEARS

Ted Whitaker

This is a look, a style, a pattern that didn't previously exist in the real world. It's something that's come out of digital. It's come out of a digital way of seeing, that represents things in this form. The real world doesn't, or at least didn't, have a grain that looks like this.'

James Bridle

Noise, grain, altered colours and square frames are fundamental visual traits of amateur filmmaking from a time before I was born. Instamatic and motion picture film cameras have never been used conventionally in my lifetime, nor have they been easily accessible. I am familiar with digital image-making, still and moving: a process that is second nature for my generation and culture. Instagram, the popular smart-phone application, arrived with golden hues to the mobile phone 'app' market in 2010 and has increased dramatically in popularity ever since. Instagram is well established as a leader in forming a contemporary aesthetic for vernacular photography, with strong nostalgic ties. As an Instagram user, I participate in this image forum, sharing immediate visual experiences with minimal post-production manipulation. With a limited range of slap-on filters and vignettes, Instagram is directing a visual continuity, contrasting with the infinity of digital photographic manipulation available through other programmes.

Classic surfing films of the 1960s and 1970s such as Albert Falzon's *Morning of the Earth* (1970) and Gary McAlpine's *Children of the Sun* (1968) have contributed to the aesthetic adopted by Instagram filters. These vibrant and playful depictions of surf culture create an odd sense of faux nostalgia, nostalgia for something never experienced. Captured in vivid colours on Super8, 16mm and 35mm celluloid, these 'authentic' films illustrate the style of an era. Photo-apps like Instagram recapitulate the preceding aesthetic to 'enhance' a seemingly banal digital image.

My short surfing film *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* (2013) adapts the visual, performative and user functionality elements of an Instagram aesthetic to a surfing culture context.² The dialogue in the film is taken from text responses attached to images on Instagram. Streaming this fragmented language of one-liners, accompanied by verbal 'hashtags', highlights the mutterings and new language born from mobile-device communication. The audio track recreates exchanges between two users, perhaps oceans away from each other, or living in the same neighbourhood.

A process common to 'appographers' is the post-production edit, widely regarded as integral to creating a successful image: the instant slap-on filter is considered a beautifying element. *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* simulates an Instagram colour grade, replicating the exact filters of Instagram.

While paying tribute to the 'look' of 1970s surfing films, *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* is a reaction to the nostalgic concept of the 'golden years' through a re-contextualisation of the earlier films' visual properties. The opening credits establish more than those responsible for making the film. Interfaces from iOS and Photoshop, embedded in the title sequences, establish a specific period of technological development. The operating system interface featured here has already been superseded, thus locating the film in a specific period in time.

Instagram can no longer be regarded as a derivative of analogue photographic techniques, but now stands alone, describing a new visual and textual culture. The aesthetic that shapes a visual culture is derived from its machines. From the hand-held digital device to sophisticated post-production tools, design determines the image that results.

1 James Bridle, "Waving at the Machines," Web Directions South, Sydney, 11-14 October 2011, <http://lanyrd.com/2011/web-directions-south/shyrk>.

2 *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* was selected for the 2013 inaugural Aotearoa International Film Festival, one of two films representing Aotearoa.